

April 15, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

Thank you for your continued dedication to American agriculture amid this unparalleled health crisis. I applaud the hard work of the U.S. Department of Agriculture as you and your staff author a strong agriculture aid program that I know will provide much-needed relief to an already vulnerable sector of the American economy. I would like to take the opportunity to ask for your support for an important piece of Georgia's agriculture footprint during this difficult time.

Georgia is home to a notably diverse group of specialty crops. According to most recent data, there are 33 different types of vegetables grown in Georgia and these products have a combined farm gate value of \$1.13 billion, contributing \$2.6 billion to the Georgia economy and providing approximately 13,900 jobs both directly and indirectly. Similarly, Georgia's fruits and nuts have an estimated farm gate value of \$614 million and contribute \$1.9 billion to the local economy with another 13,000 Georgians employed to work in and around this sector. Thanks to the hard work of Georgia farmers, Georgia is now a top five producing state for products such as blueberries, pecans, peaches, bell peppers, cucumbers, and watermelon, among others.

Specialty crops producers in Georgia face dramatic financial hardship as a direct result of the COVID-19 outbreak. As fruit and vegetable farmers across Georgia prepare to harvest and sell their crops in the coming weeks, they face an uncertain future as their usual buyers such as restaurants, schools, and hotels remain closed or unable to accept these products. I respectfully ask that USDA address these losses in any upcoming aid program. Furthermore, I implore you to work with specialty crop producers to find available avenues for them to sell and distribute their products both domestically and abroad. Georgia's strong food bank network has played an essential part in ensuring food access for Georgia residents throughout the COVID-19 outbreak and they stand ready to work with you and the agriculture community to provide nutritious food options to our at-risk population.

Georgia producers are no strangers to the obstacles and difficulties surrounding specialty crop production. In recent years, Georgia farmers have faced a multitude of barriers keeping their hard-earned products from market. Sinking commodity prices, late freezes, unfair trade policy from foreign governments, and the once-in-a-generation storm in 2018, Hurricane Michael, have all contributed to a bleak future for an otherwise strong agriculture sector. As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, it is my duty to ensure that any issue facing Georgia farmers is thoroughly addressed.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. It is my hope that we can work together to provide immediate relief for both the agriculture community and the Americans that rely on the nutritious foods they produce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kelly Loeffler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kelly Loeffler
United States Senator